Hi, I'm Diksha Basu, author of Destination Wedding. This novel takes place at an extravagant, over-the-top, one-week-long Indian wedding in New Delhi. There are choreographed Bollywood dance numbers, guests from all over the world, ill-advised romantic couplings, family upheavals, and even a couple of wedding/marriage proposals. The book opens at an airport, and that, itself, feels like such a strange reminder of a parallel world right now, since obviously we cannot fly anywhere. I hope that you read and enjoy Destination Wedding, and it allows you to, however briefly, escape the horrors that we're currently living through.

[Excerpt from the audio book, played over the book cover]

Sunday Night, 11 p.m.

JFK Airport: Their Flight Is Delayed Due to Technical Reasons and Everyone Is Secretly Wishing Airlines Didn’t Announce That and Make All the Passengers Nervous

“I cannot believe my mother is here with her boyfriend and I’m here alone,” Tina Das said to her best friend, Marianne Laing, in the British Airways business-class lounge at JFK. Tina, in the hope that she would be able to sleep through the first leg of the flight to Heathrow, had rimless glasses on instead of her usual contacts. She never needed much makeup thanks to her thick eyebrows, which had been a liability when she was younger but were very fashionable now and gave her face all the drama it needed. She was wearing black North Face sweatpants that cinched at the ankle, a gray, long-sleeved T-shirt, and black-and-white Adidas sneakers. It was hot in the lounge so her Guess fur vest was hanging off the chair behind her.

A bowl full of nuts was on the table in between them. Tina picked up a handful while staring out of the window and tossed them all into her mouth and started chewing before she realized she had eaten several whole pistachios, with shells. The hard, cracked pieces pierced her mouth and she spat them out. A grumpy old man appeared out of nowhere with a broom and shook his head at her as he swept up the pistachio shells.

“I didn’t know they had shells,” Tina said apologetically.

The man said nothing but kept looking at her as he swept, his broom knocking her foot aside.

“It isn’t my fault,” Tina said to him again but he didn’t respond.
The man walked away and Tina turned to Marianne and said, “At the price of these tickets, the nuts really shouldn’t have shells.”

Marianne was applying lip balm and laughing. She was so good at putting on makeup that it was hard to say whether or not she had any on, but the smattering of brown freckles across her nose was visible and, despite the fact that it was November, still had a velvety brownness they usually acquired over the summer because she had recently been to San Francisco for Tom’s college roommate’s wedding. Marianne was wearing similar sweatpants and a plain black long-sleeved T-shirt, and a red shawl was draped over the back of her chair.

“We’re like world-weary businesswomen who travel internationally twice a month and are just so over it,” Marianne said. “I feel like I should be impatiently clacking away on a laptop but I have no work to do this week and I bet Tom’s fast asleep.”

Marianne looked down at her phone and the itinerary that had been sent by the wedding planner.

“It feels like we’re going to have a lot of free time,” Marianne said. “There aren’t that many events listed here. I thought Indian weddings had days and days of events.”

“I think these days most people just pick and choose what parts they want to do. Shefali wanted to walk down the aisle in a white dress but my aunt put her foot down and said she could pick and choose what she wanted but she couldn’t change religions,” Tina said. “We’ll have time to explore the city, though.”

Marianne nodded as she cracked open a pistachio and ate it and played with the shells in one hand.

Their flight was two hours late so they were on glass number three of champagne and plate number two of mini sandwiches. Even on Tina’s decent income, these business-class tickets were prohibitively expensive. She had managed to book an economy flight using her own money and then used her miles to upgrade herself. Tina was the vice president of development for Pixl, a streaming network for which she sought video content, a term she hated but a job that paid her enough to live alone in a two-bedroom apartment overlooking McCarren Park in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Her work was frustrating—ideas forever on the brink of becoming television shows but nothing concrete yet, nothing complete, nothing finished. Her enthusiasm for projects always waned as more people got involved and ideas gradually got altered and then shut down altogether.

At Pixl, Tina was in charge of finding content from India so she had been back a few times over the past five years. But it was always to either Delhi or Bombay, where she stayed at a Taj Hotel, took a car and driver everywhere, and partied with producers from all over in rooftop bars and seaside clubs that could have been anywhere in the world. And then she returned to New York City without having seen much of actual India.
Tina Das was conceived in India but born, nine months later, in Columbus, Ohio. Three months later, like her father, she held a coveted American passport. Her mother stubbornly held on to her Indian passport and Green Card. For the first eight years of her life, her parents took her to India every summer and they stayed with her aunt and uncle, the parents of Shefali, the bride, in New Delhi. In the eighth summer, her father got malaria and spent two weeks in Holy Family Hospital and decided, on the flight back, that he didn’t want to return to India next year.

“Let’s go to London next summer instead,” Tina remembered him saying on the flight back that year. He had lost weight and his belt was looped tightly around, his pants bunching at the waist. Back in Ohio, he bought new pants, without pleats, Tina had noticed, and the following summer they went to London, then they went to Ubud, then Stockholm, then Buenos Aires, then Tokyo, and even Colombo the year before Tina left for Yale, but never back to India. Her mother went once when her mother died in Calcutta, but that was all before the divorce.